

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

1. ON THE OCCURRENCE OF THE COMMON OTTER IN MAHARASHTRA (ITIADOH LAKE—BHANDARA DISTRICT) WITH SOME NOTES ON ITS HABITS

Otters have been reported by local fisherman and shikaris in at least four lakes of Bhandara District (in N. E. Maharashtra in India), Nawegaon Bandh, Gandhari and Palandur constructed about 300 years ago and Itiadoh lake on the Garvi river in 1960. During the past two and a half years I too sighted them in all these lakes and recognized the species as the Common Indian Otter (*Lutra lutra*). A specimen produced to me by a fisherman from the area enabled confirmation of the species by the Bombay Natural History Society.

The Common Indian Otter has not been recorded by Prater (1971 BOOK OF INDIAN ANIMALS), as occurring in these parts, or for that matter anywhere except in Kashmir and southern India. The smooth-coated Indian Otter (*Lutra perspicillata*) too has been recorded only once in 1826 within the limits of Maharashtra (1974, MAHARASHTRA STATE GAZETTEER p. 354).

Food and Breeding Habits:

Some food and breeding habits of the Common Indian Otter which I have occasion to observe very frequently is summarized below.

The principal diet as recorded by Prater (1971) is fish which may occasionally be substituted by frogs. The animals come out on to the land near the back waters to feed upon abundant *Vetiveria zizanioides*. Common teal (*Anas crecca*), Lesser whistling teal (*Dendrocygna javanica*), Little cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*), White breasted waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*), Purple Moorhen

(*Porphyrio porphyrio*), & Water Cock (*Gallinula cinerea*). Ducks and Cormorant are seized in water and White breasted waterhen, Purple moorhen and Water Cock in wild rice (*Oriza sativa*).

They gather near fishing lines after sunset, and when one discovers a fish caught in any of the hooks, it whistles attracting four or five other individuals (possibly immediate members of its family?) and the group gorges on the fish stopping just below the head to avoid contact with the hook.

Breeding:

The nursery or 'holt' is on the bank of Itiadoh Lake. Formerly this particular spot on the bank of the river Garvi was known as Pokhar Dongari (locally meaning hollow hills) now partly submerged under the Itiadoh Lake. It has several entrances, one of them under water, a favoured breeding ground for these animals. Young ones are born blind in January-February and do not open their eyes for 2-3 days and remain in the tunnel for about a month. They can move independently after 1½ months. The mother feeds them on fish brought in her mouth. At birth they are of the size of a newly born kitten or an adult rat. The young were once found playing in the hollow of dead-decaying logs lying in the submerged areas with the mother relaxing on the log in the early hours of the morning. They remain with the parent until they can hunt and feed independently. The same tunnels are used earlier (Nov.-Dec.) by Porcu-

pinus for breeding.

Bhandara District also known as the lake district of Maharashtra has several lakes. It

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is therefore very likely that there are other strongholds of this Otter within the District. This however needs further investigation.

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2. EVIDENCE FOR A TIGER EATING A PANTHER CUB

In general predators tend to be intolerant of each other even to the extent of killing without provocation—and not just at kills (Schaller 1972). It has been recorded that tigers are intolerant of leopards (Anderson 1961) and the encounter some times may be fatal for the leopard (Allen 1960). Leopards killed may also be eaten by the tiger (Anderson 1954). Many of these type of findings in the Indian Jungle are obviously based on indirect evidence as the dense vegetation, the shy nature of the animals and the element of danger involved in going close to the animals seldom allow a field worker to witness the skirmish from the beginning to the end.

On 12.3.1978 an elephant mahout had seen a tiger in a bamboo-clad dry stream bed a kilometre from Bandipur Campus. When I was told about this, suspecting a kill, I combed the area in the company of Keechanna my tribal boy the next morning. Jungle crows were hovering over that area and while walking through the dense stand of bamboo I saw a panther lying on a *Terminalia bellerica* tree 10-12 metre from me. Cursing myself for not having brought the camera I slowly and silently retreated. My withdrawal enabled Keechanna to see the panther. Soon he ran to Bandipur to bring my camera and I climbed a tree 100

metres away and waited for 45 minutes watching the crows mobbing the panther.

Keechanna brought not only my camera but also Dr. Madhav Gadgil and two of his students. From a distance I showed them the panther and as all wanted to photograph we stalked through the bamboo but the panther jumped down and ran away.

Crows were still cawing and I continued my search for the kill. In one place I smelt the kill and the buzzing flies led me to the remains—skull, one lower jaw, one claw and intestine—of a panther cub approximately 3-4 month old. On the grass we could see the hair of the tiger and the panther. Impressions on the grass under a bush also showed the place where the tiger had been lying while eating. Twice it had drunk water in the nearby pool.

Earlier twice I had seen panthers on trees and in one instance, when a tiger was involved, the panther did not even jump down when I climbed a tree 10 metres away. But on the other occasion I saw a panther from 200 metres and hardly had I advanced 100 metres across an open area before the panther got down and ran away. However it should also be mentioned that in both cases where tigers were involved I had accidentally approached the panther through dense vegetation.